

Talleyrand's flagrant immoralities and insatiable greed are known to all the world, and they admit of no defence. "How did you manage to get so rich ? " asked Napoleon. "It was quite simple," came the adroit reply; "I bought rentes the day before Brumaire and sold them the day after." "A silk stocking filled with dirt/* it was said of him, perhaps by the first Lord Granville. It is only a partial excuse that his parents neglected him as a child and forced him into the Church with as little vocation as de Retz. For his public conduct there is much more to be said. He gambled at cards but not in politics. Acton allows him, not principles, but a nucleus of opinions. His defence for serving different regimes, namely that he was working throughout for the interest of France and constitutional monarchy, sounds suspiciously like an afterthought, a little too good to be true. Though the patriotic plea is substantially accepted by Mr. Duff Cooper, the most brilliant of his biographers, the French Vicar of Bray is hardly to be regarded as a model of consistency. He helped the Emperor to turn Europe upside down, and dropped him at the height of his power. Was it far-seeing patriotism or the rat's mysterious instinct for leaving a sinking ship ? " You are a coward, a traitor, a thief," cried the Emperor at their last meeting in 1814. " You do not even believe in God. You have betrayed and deceived everybody. You would sell your own father/* Talleyrand never answered back, but such scenes strengthened his resolve to work for the restoration of the Bourbons. A famous passage in the Memoirs of Chateaubriand, who hated and despised him, describes him and Fouche entering the Cabinet of Louis XVEH together in the biting phrase: Vice leaning on crime. Quand S ne conspire pas il trafique. Yet that is not the whole story. Cynic though he was,

he loved
France as much as he could love anything, and
at Vienna the
greatest of French diplomatists rendered her
priceless service.

We learn almost as much about Napoleon as a
man from
Consalvi as from Talleyrand. The Memoirs of
"the Great
Cardinal" published by Cretineau-Joly in 1864,
forty years
after his death, are the only work of the kind
emanating from
the Vatican in modern times. Visitors to the
Pantheon will
remember Thorwaldsen's bust of the famous
Secretary of
State of Pius VII, the man who made the
Concordat, who stood
up to the Emperor in the plenitude of his power,
who suffered
imprisonment rather than surrender what he
regarded as the
rights of his Church, who represented the
Papacy at the